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## PRUDEN ON POLITICS

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# 'Second chances' on the road to hell

Vitaly Yurchenko, who didn't deserve it, got "a second chance" yesterday because Miroslav Medvid, who does, didn't.

The U.S. government, humiliated by the turncoat turncoat who played the CIA as if it were a pawnshop guitar, huffed and puffed through scarlet cheeks and said Mr. Yurchenko couldn't leave the United States until State Department officers talked to him and satisfied themselves that he really wants to go home again.

Wow! These guys are tough!

The State Department sent someone who is easily satisfied to talk to Mr. Yurchenko. William W. Woessner, acting assistant secretary of state for European affairs is also the man who explained to a Senate committee yesterday what a swell job the State Department did for Miroslav Medvid in New Orleans.

Mr. Woessner told the senators, who did not appear to be overwhelmed by his evidence, that U.S. officials "became convinced" that the seaman did not really want to stay in the United States — that he only wanted to return to his ship and go home.

Diplomats are not encumbered by the blunt language that most of us speak. Diplomats are accustomed to watching for "signals" and these "signals" often escape the notice of people who speak in plain words. But the "signals" have to be obscure, nebulous, and unintelligible to be understood.

That's why Miroslav Medvid couldn't make himself understood when he leaped into the Mississippi River, and was dragged kicking and screaming back to his ship. He couldn't even get his point across when he leaped into the Mississippi the second time. He was speaking a language diplomats just don't understand when he slashed his wrists.

U.S. officials say now they understood he fell into the river while making electrical repairs.

Mr. Woessner couldn't even figure out what to make of the slashed wrists. When someone asked him whether this was an indication of a suicide attempt, Mr. Woessner, ever the cautious mouseburger, replied, "I don't know."

(God help Mrs. Woessner if, confronted with an intruder in her bedroom at 3 o'clock in the morning, all she can think of to yell to Mr. Woessner is "rape!" or "help!")

Alan C. Nelson, commissioner of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, conceded that "established procedures" (that's bureaucratic talk for "covering the seat of our pants") were not followed.

"Mistakes in judgment were made," he told the senators. "Existing procedures for handling possible asylum claimants were not followed."

However, in the end it all came right. The procedures were "corrected." The decision to return Seaman Medvid to "Soviet control," he said, was "a proper one."

Miroslav Medvid and Vitaly Yurchenko are probably going home to the same suburb of hell, but greater concern was paid for the welfare of Mr. Yurchenko because (a) he was no mere Ukrainian swabbie, foolish enough to believe the jive talk of American presidents and secretaries of state, and (b) he was, to the bureaucrats, "one of us."

No matter what he gets, it will be considerably less than Mr. Yurchenko, a KGB agent who long ago learned to maim and kill without flinching, really deserves. He is a man engaged in a cynical business, much too sophisticated to be motivated by the yearnings that drive unsophisticated young men to leap into troubled waters on the chance they might breathe the sweet breath of free men.

Drugged, tortured, and overfed though he may have been, Mr. Yurchenko remembered exactly the details in the contract the CIA offered to him — the lump sum, the annual "salary," the inflation clause.

Miroslav Medvid, who held no state secrets to barter for his life, will remember only the kindness of strangers who tried to help him in his few brief hours of freedom on the streets of New Orleans — before the agents of the U.S. government arrived to betray him.